

From the INTERNATIONAL BUREAU

PCT

NOTIFICATION OF ELECTION

(PCT Rule 61.2)

To:

Commissioner
US Department of Commerce
United States Patent and Trademark
Office, PCT
2011 South Clark Place Room
CP2/5C24
Arlington, VA 22202
ETATS-UNIS D'AMERIQUE

Date of mailing (day/month/year)
20 February 2001 (20.02.01)

International application No.
PCT/IB00/00636

International filing date (day/month/year)
12 May 2000 (12.05.00)

Applicant

FILIPPI, Ermanno et al

1.	The designated Office is hereby notified of its election made:	
	X in the demand filed with the International Preliminary Examining Authority on:	
	15 December 2000 (15.12.00)	
	in a notice effecting later election filed with the International Bureau on:	
2.	The election X was	
	was not	
	made before the expiration of 19 months from the priority date or, where Rule 32 applies, within the time limit under Rule 32.2(b).	

The International Bureau of WIPO 34, chemin des Colombettes 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland

Authorized officer

Pascal Piriou

Telephone No.: (41-22) 338.83.38

Facsimile No.: (41-22) 740.14.35

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

A CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER IPC 7 B01J8/02 According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC B. FIELDS SEARCHED Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) IPC 7 B01J Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used) **EPO-Internal** C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages Relevant to claim No. DE 37 08 957 A (LINDE AG) Submitted

Submitted

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Submitted

12/17/01

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Submitted

12/17/01 6 October 1988 (1988-10-06) column 2, line 65 -column 4, line 5 column 5, line 17 - line 44 figures 7-11 GB 391 444 A (BRITISH CELANESE LIMITED) 1,6,9 page 3, right-hand column, line 94 - line 122 figures 1,2 7,8 AT 362 397 B (ROBERT SCHOBER) 1 11 May 1981 (1981-05-11) page 5, line 23 - line 35 figures 7,8 7-9 Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C. Patent family members are listed in annex. ° Special categories of cited documents: "T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the "A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance invention "E" earlier document but published on or after the international "X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to filing date "L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified) involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such docu-"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or ments, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art. document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed "&" document member of the same patent family Date of the actual completion of the international search Date of mailing of the international search report 11/08/2000 3 August 2000 Name and mailing address of the ISA Authorized officer European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl, 1 Stevnsborg, N Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

P 00/05470

C/Comb	ation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT	
Category °		Relevant to daim No.
A	DE 855 258 C (IMPERIAL CHEMICAL INDUSTRIES) page 2, right-hand column, line 92 - line 117 page 3, left-hand column, line 17 - line 60 page 3, right-hand column, line 114 -page 4, left-hand column, line 23 figures 1,2	1-10
140 17/01		1-10
1 A Hel 17/01 A Hel 17/01 A Hel	US 3 663 179 A (DINSHAW D. MEHTA & EDWARD J. MILLER) 16 May 1972 (1972-05-16) the whole document	1-10
A Hell	WO 94 12274 A (SHELL CANADA LIMITED) 9 June 1994 (1994-06-09) abstract; figures	1-10
A	ULRICH LAHNE & REINER LOHMÜLLER: "Schüttschichtreaktoren mit gewickelten Kühlrohren, eine konstruktive Neuentwicklung zur Durchführung exothermer katalytischer Prozesse" CHEMIE. INGENIEUR. TECHNIK., vol. 58, no. 3, 1986, pages 212-215, XP002124824 VERLAG CHEMIE GMBH. WEINHEIM., DE ISSN: 0009-286X the whole document	

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

nformon patent family members

P 00/05470

Patent document cited in search repor	t	Publication dat		Patent family member(s)	Publication date
DE 3708957	Α	06-10-1988	NONE		
GB 391444	Α		NONE		
AT 362397	В	11-05-1981	AT	759076 A	15-06-1978
DE 855258	С		NONE		
EP 534195	A	31-03-1993	DE DE ES JP	4131446 A 59203370 D 2075552 T 5261272 A	09-06-1993 28-09-1995 01-10-1995 12-10-1993
US 3663179	Α	16-05-1972	DE FR	2119127 A 2090510 A	04-11-1971 14-01-1972
WO 9412274	Α	09-06-1994	AU ZA	5563394 A 9308618 A	22-06-1994 04-08-1994

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PATENT COOPERATION TREATY





INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT

(PCT Article 36 and Rule 70)

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Applicant's or agent's file reference MTC012BWO -FOR FU			FOR FURTHER A	CTION		cation of Transmittal of International y Examination Report (Form PCT/IPEA/416)	
						,	
1	• •	lication No.	International filing date (aay/montn	year)	Priority date (day/month/year)	
L	300/006		ational classification and IP			13/00/1999	
B01J8		ent Classification (IPC) or n	ational classification and in-	•			
Applican							
Applican		CASALE S.A. et al.					
IVIETO	ANOL	CASALE S.A. et al.					
				prepared	by this Inte	ernational Preliminary Examining Authority	
and	d is tran	smitted to the applicant	according to Article 36.				
2. Thi	is REPC	ORT consists of a total o	f 5 sheets, including this	s cover sh	neet.		
	This re	eport is also accompanio	ed by ANNEXES, i.e. she	ets of the	e descriptio	on, claims and/or drawings which have	
}	been a	mended and are the ba	sis for this report and/or	sheets co	ontaining re	ectifications made before this Authority	
<u>}</u>	(see F	tule 70.16 and Section 6	607 of the Administrative	instructio	ons unaer u	ne PC1).	
The	ese ann	exes consist of a total of	f sheets.				
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3. Thi	ic roport	contains indications rel	ating to the following iter	ne.			
3. 1111	is report	COMMINS MOICEMONS TE	ating to the following iter	113.			
	I 🛭	Basis of the report					
	II 🗆						
1				velty, inv	entive step	and industrial applicability	
	_	Lack of unity of invent		amand ta m		autica atau an indicatrial applications	
	v 🛭		inder Article 35(2) with re ions suporting such state		iov <u>e</u> ity, inve	entive step or industrial applicability;	
·	/1 🗆		· -			•	
V	II 🛛	Certain defects in the	international application				
VI	II 🛛	Certain observations	on the international appli	cation			
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Date of s	submissio	on of the demand		Date of c	completion of	this report	
15/12/2	2000			02.10.20	01		
Name ar	nd mailing	address of the internation	al	Authorize	ed officer		
	ary exam	ining authority:				B. B	
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<u> </u>	Tel.	+49 89 2399 - 0 Tx: 52365	66 epmu d			A STATE OF THE STA	
		+49 89 2399 - 4465		Telephone No. +49 89 2399 8346			

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INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT

International application No. PCT/IB00/00636

ı.	Bas	sis of the report					
1.	With regard to the elements of the international application (Replacement sheets which have been furnished to the receiving Office in response to an invitation under Article 14 are referred to in this report as "originally filed" and are not annexed to this report since they do not contain amendments (Rules 70.16 and 70.17)): Description, pages:						
	1-1	9	as o rigin ally filed				
	Cła	ims, No.:	-				
	1-1	0	as originally filed				
	Dra	awings, sheets:					
	1-6		as originally filed				
2.			guage, all the elements marked above were available or furnished to this Authority in the international application was filed, unless otherwise indicated under this item.				
	The	ese elements were	available or furnished to this Authority in the following language: , which is:				
		• •	translation furnished for the purposes of the international search (under Rule 23.1(b)).				
		the language of p	ublication of the international application (under Rule 48.3(b)).				
		the language of a 55.2 and/or 55.3).	translation furnished for the purposes of international preliminary examination (under Rule				
3.			cleotide and/or amino acid sequence disclosed in the international application, the ry examination was carried out on the basis of the sequence listing:				
		contained in the ir	nternational application in written form.				
	filed together with the international application in computer readable form.						

☐ The statement that the subsequently furnished written sequence listing does not go beyond the disclosure in

☐ The statement that the information recorded in computer readable form is identical to the written sequence

4. The amendments have resulted in the cancellation of:

☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in written form.

☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in computer readable form.

the international application as filed has been furnished.

the description,	pages:
the claims,	Nos.:

listing has been furnished.

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INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT

International application No. PCT/IB00/00636

		the drawings,	sheets:		
5.		•		-	ome of) the amendments had not been made, since they have been as filed (Rule 70.2(c)):
		(Any replacement she report.)	et contail	ning such	amendments must be referred to under item 1 and annexed to this
6.	Add	 litional observations, if	necessar	y:	
V.		soned statement und tions and explanation			rith regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability;
1.	Stat	tement			
	Nov	velty (N)	Yes: No:	Claims Claims	
	Inve	entive step (IS)	Yes: No:	Claims Claims	2-9 1,10
	Indu	ustrial applicability (IA)	Yes: No:	Claims Claims	1-10
2.		itions and explanations separate sheet	5	· .	

VII. Certain defects in the international application

The following defects in the form or contents of the international application have been noted: see separate sheet

VIII. Certain observations on the international application

The following observations on the clarity of the claims, description, and drawings or on the question whether the claims are fully supported by the description, are made: see separate sheet

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Re Item V

Reasoned statement under Article 35(2) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement

1). Reference is made to the following documents:

D1=GB-A-1270568

D2=AT-A-362397

D3=EP-A-534195

2). D3 discloses a reactor according to claim 1, see D3: figures 1,2; claims 1, 6; column 6, lines 1-40. D3 describes that the coil consists of a plurality of independent (tube) layers. These layers are considered to be structurally independent modular units.

D1 discloses a modular heat exchange unit according to claim 10 of the application, see D1: figures 1, 4.

D1 does not disclose that modular heat exchange unit wraps around an inner cylindrical side wall of the catalytic bed. However, the inner cylindrical side wall of the catalytic bed is not part of the modular heat exchange unit, for which protected is sought in claim 10 of the application. The modular heat exchange units of D1 can also wrap around an inner cylindrical side wall of the catalytic bed.

Therefore claims 1 and 10 do not fulfil the requirements of Article 33(2) PCT (novelty).

The additional features of dependent claims 2 to 9 describing features of the 3). modular units for quick connecting these units and for enabling these units to be superimposed and stacked the one on the other on site do not appear to be obvious in view of the available prior art documents.

Therefore dependent claims 2 to 9 of the application fulfil the requirements of Article 33(3) PCT (inventive step).

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Re Item VII

Certain defects in the international application

4). Contrary to the requirements of Rule 5.1(a)(ii) PCT, the relevant background art disclosed in the documents D1 and D3 is not mentioned in the description, nor are these documents identified therein.

Re Item VIII

Certain observations on the international application

5). The term "a spiral, a coil <u>or alike</u>" used in claims 1, 4, 6, 10 is vague and unclear and leaves the reader in doubt as to the meaning of the technical features to which it refers, thereby rendering the definition of the subject-matter of said claims unclear (Article 6 PCT).

RECORD COPY

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REQUEST

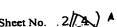
The undersigned requests that the present international application be processed

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according to the Patent Cooperation Treaty. Applicant's or agent's file reference (if desired) (12 characters maximum) MTC012BWO TITLE OF INVENTION Box No. I "Reactor, in particular for exothermic reactions" **APPLICANT** Box No. II Name and address: (Family name followed by given name; for a legal entity, full official designation. The address must include postal code and name of country. The country of the address indicated in this Box is the applicant's State (that is, country) of residence if no State of residence is indicated below.) This person is also inventor. Telephone No. +41/91/960 72 00 Methanol Casale S.A. Facsimile No. Via Sorengo 7 +41/91/960 72 92 CH-6900 Lugano-Besso Switzerland Teleprinter No. State (that is, country) of nationality: State (that is, country) of residence: all designated States except the United States of America the United States the States indicated in This person is applicant all designated the Supplemental Box for the purposes of: FURTHER APPLICANT(S) AND/OR (FURTHER) INVENTOR(S) Box No. III Name and address: (Family name followed by given name; for a legal entity, full official designation. The address must include postal code and name of country. The country of the address indicated in this Box is the applicant's State (that is, country) of residence if no State This person is: of residence is indicated below.) applicant only FILIPPI Ermanno applicant and inventor Strada Gandria 73 CH-6976 Castagnola inventor only (If this check-box is marked, do not fill in below.) Switzerland State (that is, country) of nationality: State (that is, country) of residence: IT the States indicated in the Supplemental Box the United States of America only all designated States except the United States of America all designated States This person is applicant l x l for the purposes of: Further applicants and/or (further) inventors are indicated on a continuation sheet. AGENT OR COMMON REPRESENTATIVE; OR ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE Box No. IV The person identified below is hereby/has been appointed to act on behalf agent agent common representative of the applicant(s) before the competent International Authorities as: Name and address: (Family name followed by given name; for a legal entity, full official designation. The address must include postal code and name of country.) Telephone No. +41/91/910 65 00 ZARDI Marco Facsimile No. M. ZARDI & CO. S.A. +41/91/910 65 09 Via Pioda 6 Teleprinter No. CH-6900 Lugano Switzerland Address for correspondence: Mark this check-box where no agent or common representative is/has been appointed and the space above is used instead to indicate a special address to which correspondence should be sent.

Form PCT/RO/101 (first sheet) (July 1998; reprint July 1999)

See Notes to the request form



Sheet No. . 2 A

Continuation of Box No. III FURTHER APPLICANT(S) AND/OR (FURTHER) INVENTOR(S)					
If none of the following sub-boxes is used, this sheet should n	ot be included in the request.				
Name and address: (Family name followed by given name; for a legal entity, full off designation. The address must include postal code and name of country. The country of address indicated in this Box is the applicant's State (that is, country) of residence if no Soft residence is indicated below.) RIZZI Enrico Via Montale 10 I-22070 Grandate (CO) Italy	This person is: applicant only applicant and inventor inventor only (If this check-box is marked, do not fill in below.)				
State (mar s), commy), or married	untry) of residence:				
This person is applicant all designated states except for the purposes of:	the United States of America only the States indicated in the Supplemental Box				
Name and address: (Family name followed by given name; for a legal entity, full off designation. The address must include postal code and name of country. The country of address indicated in this Box is the applicant's State (that is, country) of residence if no sof residence is indicated below.) TAROZZO Mirco Via L. Piffaretti CH-6853 Ligornetto Switzerland	This person is: applicant only applicant and inventor inventor only (If this check-box is marked, do not fill in below.)				
State (mar is, country) of manoning.	untry) of residence:				
This person is applicant for the purposes of: all designated states except the United States of America	X the United States the States indicated in the Supplemental Box				
Name and address: (Family name followed by given name; for a legal entity, full of designation. The address must include postal code and name of country. The country address indicated in this Box is the applicant's State (that is, country) of residence if not of residence is indicated below.)	ficial of the State This person is: applicant only applicant and inventor inventor only (If this check-box is marked, do not fill in below.)				
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Name and address: (Family name followed by given name; for a legal entity, full of designation. The address must include postal code and name of country. The country address indicated in this Box is the applicant's State (that is, country) of residence if no of residence is indicated below.)					
State (that is, country) of nationality: State (that is, country)	nuntry) of residence:				
This person is applicant for the purposes of: all designated States except the United States of America	the United States of America only the States indicated in the Supplemental Box				
Further applicants and/or (further) inventors are indicated on another contin	uation sheet.				

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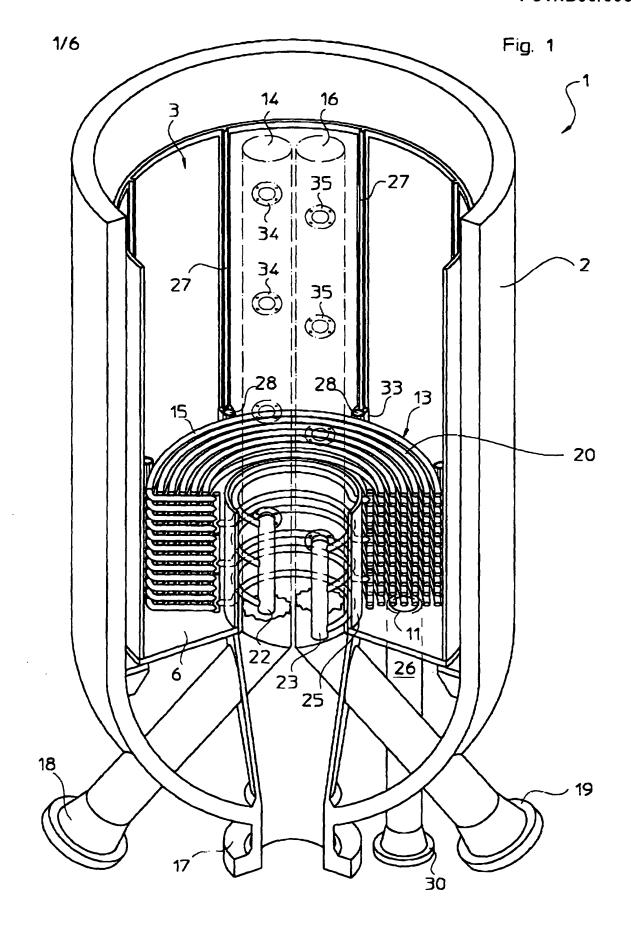
The following designations are hereby made under Rule 4.9a) (more the applicable check-basses; at least one must be morbad): Regional Prates: A P ARIPO Petters: GH Chana, GM Gambia, KE Korva, LS Lesotha, MW Malawi, SD Sudan, SI, Sierra Lonce, SZ Swedland, AW Zimbowe, and say other State which is a Contracting State of the Harar Protocol and of the PCT TO Lunder Republic of Tanzamia, UG Ugambia, AW Zimbowe, and say other State which is a Contracting State of the Harar Protocol and of the PCT E P European Patternt: AT A Austria, RE Belgium, CH and LJ Switzerland and Licchtenstein, Of the Democratic Convention and of the PCT EV European Patternt: AT Austria, RE Belgium, CH and LJ Switzerland and Licchtenstein, CY Cypres, DB Germany, DBK Chemmer, EAT, P Torougal, SS Sweden, and say other State which is a Contracting State of the European Patternt CAT. PLANTING, EAT, Protocol, CONCRETE AND CONCRETE AND AUSTRIA, RE Belgium, CH and LJ Switzerland and Licchtenstein, CY Cypres, DBC Germany, DBK Chemmer, CH. PT Austria, EB Belgium, CH and LJ Switzerland and Licchtenstein, CY Cypres, DBC Germany, Convention and of the PCT. ED CA OAPT Patternt EB Burkina Faso, BJ Benin, CF Commal African Republic, CG Consp., CJ Côte d'Ivoire, CM Cameroon, GA Cafebou, GN Guines, CW Guines-Bisses, ML Mahi, MR Maurtrain, NR Miger, SN Seengal, TD Cach, CT Grop, and any other State which is a member State of OAPT and a Contracting State of the PCT (Fisher Intel of protocetion or reasonant desired, apolity on a close of the PCT (Fisher Intel of protocetion or reasonant desired, apolity on a close of the PCT (Fisher Intel of protocetion or reasonant desired, apolity on a close of the PCT (Fisher Intel of PCT) EAR United Amb Emirates ED LR Liberia EL LL Libe	Bo	XN.	V DESIGNATION OF STATES							
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Next to each signature, indicate the no	ame of the person signing a	and the capacity in which the person sig	zns (if such capacity is not ob	vious from reading the request).		
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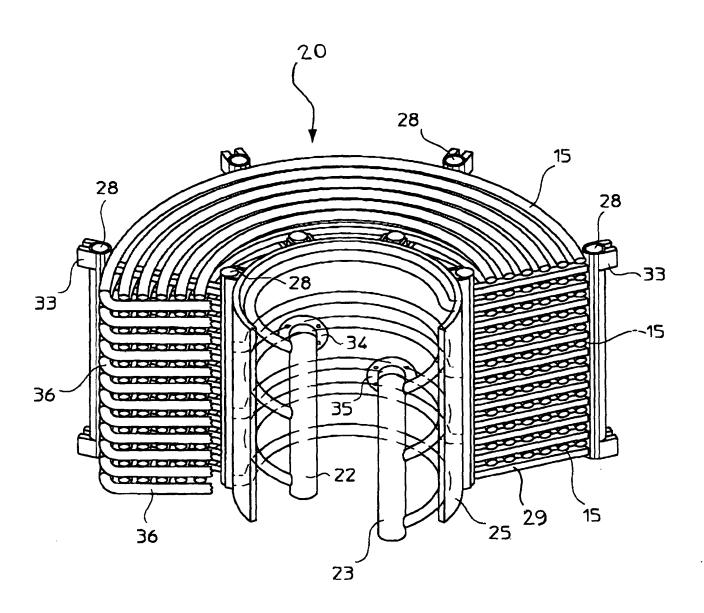


Fig. 2

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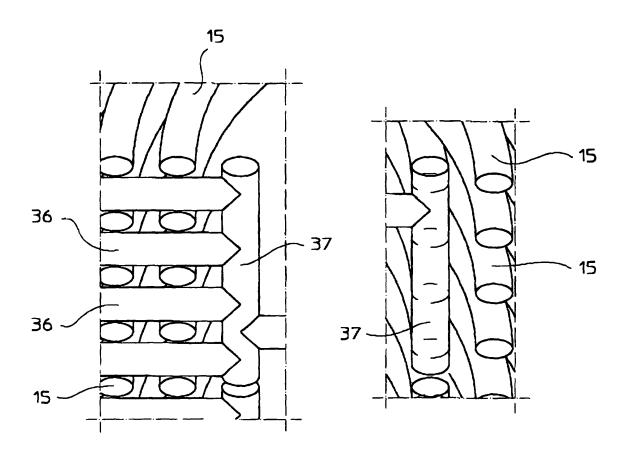


Fig. 3

Fig. 4

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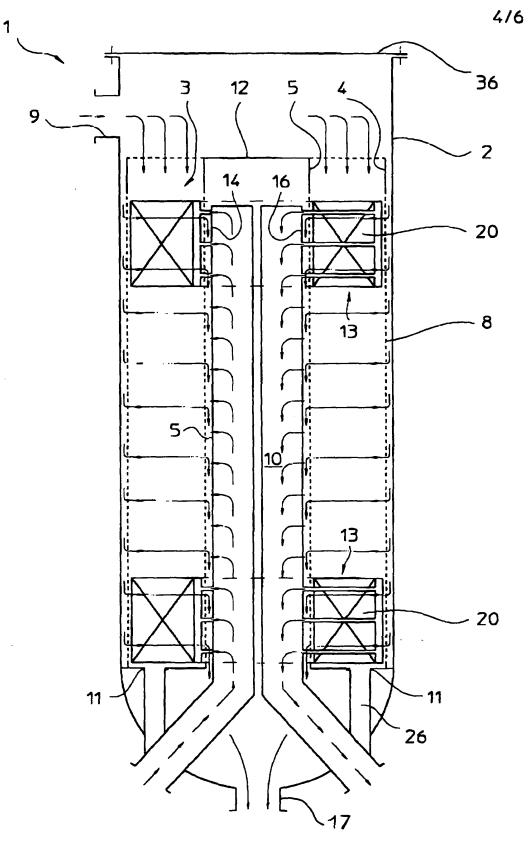
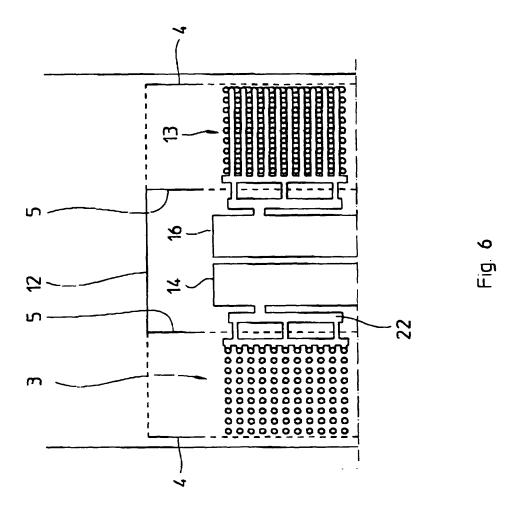


Fig. 5

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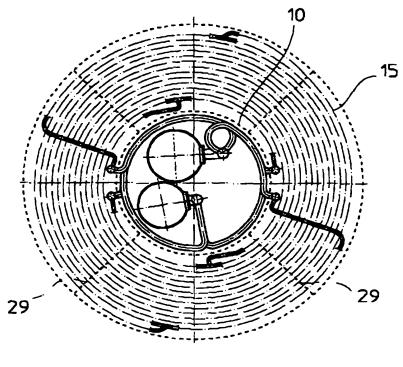


Fig. 7

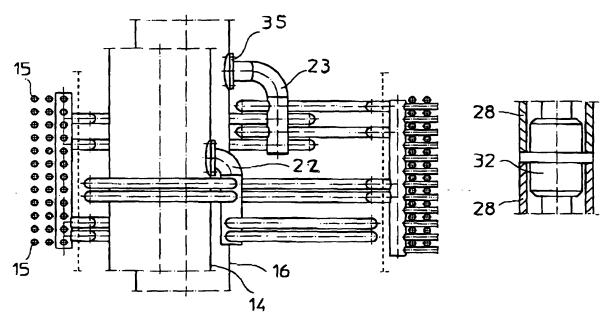


Fig. 8

Fig. 9

Titolo: Reattore, in particolare per reazioni esotermiche.

DESCRIZIONE

Campo di applicazione

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La presente invenzione fa riferimento ad un reattore, in particolare per reazioni esotermiche, del tipo comprendente:

- un mantello di forma sostanzialmente cilindrica;
- almeno un letto catalitico nel mantello, comprendente una parete laterale esterna cilindrica traforata, formante intercapedine con detto mantello, ed una parete laterale interna coassiale alla precedente;
- nonché uno scambiatore di calore in detto letto, lo scambiatore essendo formato da una pluralità di tubi a spirale, serpentina o simili in comunicazione di fluido con collettori di adduzione e di scarico di un fluido di raffreddamento.
 - In questo specifico settore tecnico ci si riferisce a questo genere di reattori con il termine "reattori isotermi" o "pseudo isotermi", intendendo indicare reattori all'interno dei quali la temperatura del o dei letti catalitici in cui avviene la reazione rimane sostanzialmente costante o controllata lungo un profilo prestabilito durante le fasi di processo sia di tipo esotermico, sia di tipo endotermico.
- Reattori di questo tipo sono ad esempio impiegati per la sintesi di sostanze chimiche, quali il metanolo o la formaldeide, tramite reazioni esotermiche. Questi reattori possono anche essere utilizzati per la sintesi di sostanze chimiche ottenute tramite reazioni endotermiche, come ad esempio lo stirene.
- Per questo campo di applicazione è sempre più sentita l'esigenza di realizzare reattori isotermi di buona resa ed affidabilità che siano anche di semplice realizzazione con bassi costi di investimento e manutenzione. Queste caratteristiche debbono comunque essere compatibili con una capacità di operare con basse perdite di carico, bassi consumi energetici ed elevata efficienza di scambio termico tra i reagenti ed il fluido di raffreddamento o riscaldamento.

Arte nota

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La tecnica nota propone già una serie di soluzioni per cercare di soddisfare alle suddette esigenze. Ad esempio, sono stati proposti vari tipi di reattori isotermi con letti catalitici di tipo radiale includenti una fitta pluralità di tubi di scambio termico disposti verticalmente.

Un esempio di tali reattori è descritto nella domanda di brevetto tedesca No. DE-A-3 318 098 nella quale è previsto un reattore comprendente un fascio di tubi di scambio termico disposti secondo una forma elicoidale che si sviluppa verticalmente attorno ad un collettore assiale. E' da notare che configurazioni elicoidali dei tubi di scambio termico sono note anche in reattori isotermi a letto catalitico assiale, come descritto ad esempio nei brevetti US-A-4 339 413 e US-A-4 636 365.

Pur vantaggioso sotto alcuni aspetti, in quanto la configurazione radiale del letto catalitico permette di ottenere in modo semplice ed economico elevate capacità produttive con basse perdite di carico e bassi consumi energetici, rispetto ad un letto di tipo assiale, il reattore isotermo nella suddetta domanda tedesca presenta una serie di inconvenienti qui di seguito evidenziati.

Primo fra tutti il fatto che la distribuzione dei tubi, sotto forma di un fascio tubiero elicoidale non si adatta efficacemente alle modalità di rilascio o assorbimento del calore dal flusso di reagenti gassosi che attraversa il letto catalitico con moto radiale. Infatti, il flusso di gas che fluisce perpendicolarmente rispetto allo sviluppo verticale dei tubi elicoidali, viene in contatto - attraversando il letto catalitico - con tubi diversi a temperature diverse, e ciò provoca una bassa efficienza di scambio termico tra i reagenti gassosi ed il fluido di scambio termico.

In altre parole, nel caso di una reazione esotermica con i reagenti gassosi che fluiscono con moto radiale attraverso il letto catalitico, i tubi elicoidali esterni vengono investiti da un gas che ha appena cominciato a reagire, e rilascia quindi poco calore, mentre i tubi elicoidali più interni vengono investiti da un gas da cui ricevono una quantità di calore sempre maggiore fino ad un punto dove il rilascio di calore dal gas di reazione è massimo. Da quel punto, la temperatura diminuisce e quindi la quantità di calore

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che ricevono i tubi elicoidali disposti in prossimità della parete di uscita gas del letto catalitico è progressivamente minore.

Ne consegue che ogni tubo elicoidale riceve una diversa quantità di calore e quindi si trova a sopportare un diverso carico termico. Questo provoca una cattiva distribuzione delle temperature nel letto catalitico a scapito dell'efficienza di scambio termico.

Ad esempio, qualora all'interno dei tubi fluisca acqua calda per l'asportazione del calore di reazione, acqua che viene trasformata in vapore, risulta evidente come con la configurazione a fascio tubiero elicoidale nessuno dei tubi produce la stessa quantità di vapore. Ciò comporta notevoli problemi di regolazione e di alimentazione/asportazione del fluido di raffreddamento in corrispondenza delle piastre tubiere, cosi come una cattiva distribuzione dell'acqua e del vapore all'interno di tali tubi.

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A questo proposito è bene osservare come tutti i tubi del reattore isotermo descritto in DE-A-3 318 098 sono tra loro in parallelo. Pertanto la perdita di carico disponibile per ogni tubo elicoidale è la stessa.

In DE-A-3 318 098, i tubi elicoidali a contatto con i reagenti gassosi a bassa temperatura sono soggetti ad un carico termico basso, il che significa basso grado di vaporizzazione dell'acqua con conseguente bassa velocità di efflusso e quindi elevate portate, in massa, d'acqua. I tubi elicoidali a contatto con i reagenti gassosi ad alta temperatura sono invece soggetti ad un carico termico elevato, il che significa un alto grado di evaporazione dell'acqua con conseguente alta velocità di efflusso e quindi basse portate, in massa, d'acqua.

Pertanto, quando il reattore è in marcia si viene a creare una situazione in cui le eliche soggette ad un carico termico elevato risultano essere quelle alimentate con meno acqua e tendono perciò ad avere un grado di evaporazione sempre maggiore ed una capacità di esportazione del calore sempre minore. Questo porta ad una distribuzione delle temperature all'interno del letto catalitico non ottimale in caso di reazioni moderatamente esotermiche come la sintesi del metanolo, mentre nel caso

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di reazioni veloci e fortemente esotermiche come la sintesi della formaldeide può addirittura portare ad una fuga delle temperature.

Inoltre, l'eccessiva evaporazione favorisce la formazione nei tubi di depositi di residui presenti nell'acqua a scapito dell'efficienza di scambio termico degli stessi. Tutti questi svantaggi sono indipendenti dal fatto che i tubi siano distribuiti a distanze più o meno ravvicinate a seconda del profilo di temperatura dei reagenti gassosi all'interno del letto catalitico.

Un ulteriore svantaggio del reattore secondo l'arte nota è dato dall'elevata complessità strutturale e realizzativa risultante dalla conformazione elicoidale del fascio tubiero che richiede elevati costi di investimento e di manutenzione.

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Proprio a causa di questi svantaggi, i reattori isotermi per l'effettuazione di sintesi eterogenee esotermiche o endotermiche con letto catalitico radiale e fascio tubiero elicoidale o verticale hanno trovato a tutt'oggi scarsa applicazione pratica, nonostante l'esigenza sempre più sentita nel settore di reattori ad alta capacità.

Una ulteriore soluzione tecnica nota e descritta nella domanda di brevetto tedesca DE-A- 3 708 957 nella quale, in una sua forma di realizzazione, si fa riferimento ad un reattore isotermo del tipo comprendente un mantello di forma sostanzialmente cilindrica, almeno un letto catalitico nel mantello, comprendente una parete laterale esterna cilindrica non forata ed una parete laterale interna coassiale alla precedente non forata, ed un fondo anulare traforato. E' previsto inoltre uno scambiatore di calore nel letto catalitico, il quale scambiatore è formato da una pluralità di tubi a spirale disposti trasversalmente all'asse del mantello; detti tubi essendo in comunicazione di fluido con collettori di adduzione e di scarico di un fluido di raffreddamento.

Come per la precedente soluzione tecnica nota, questa struttura di reattore è di difficile realizzazione con bassi costi di investimento. La complessità dello scambiatore non consente di porre rimedio ad eventuali danni che dovessero presentarsi internamente durante l'uso del reattore.

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Inoltre, i reagenti gassosi fluiscono all'interno del letto in modo trasversale rispetto ai tubi a spirale per il passaggio del fluido di raffreddamento, e quindi lo scambio termico tra i fluidi presenta gli stessi inconvenienti più sopra riportati.

Il problema tecnico che sta alla base della presente invenzione è quello di mettere a disposizione un reattore isotermo o pseudo isotermo per effettuare reazioni eterogenee, esotermiche o endotermiche, il quale abbia caratteristiche strutturali e funzionali tali da consentire una realizzazione semplice e affidabile, che richieda bassi costi di investimento e manutenzione e consenta di operare con bassi carichi meccanici sugli interni e con un'elevata efficienza di scambio termico tra i reagenti ed il fluido di raffreddamento o riscaldamento.

Sommario dell'Invenzione

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L'idea di soluzione che sta alla base della presente invenzione è quella di prevedere una pluralità di unità modulari formate da gruppi di tubi avvolti a spirale, serpentina o simili e ciascuna formante una porzione di scambiatore di calore, le quali unità modulari possono venire sovrapposte ed impilate l'una sull'altra in cantiere e collegate a collettori di adduzione e scarico del fluido di raffreddamento/riscaldamento.

Sulla base di tale idea di soluzione il problema tecnico viene risolto, secondo l'invenzione, da un reattore del tipo precedentemente indicato e caratterizzato per il fatto che lo scambiatore comprende una pluralità di unità modulari sovrapposte, strutturalmente indipendenti, ciascuna delle quali include almeno due tubi a spirale, serpentina o simili disposti trasversalmente all'asse del mantello e avvolgenti un corrispondente tratto di detta parete laterale interna di detto letto catalitico, e dotate di rispettivi tratti di raccordo a detti collettori di adduzione e di scarico.

Grazie alla presente invenzione è possibile realizzare, in modo semplice ed efficace, un reattore isotermo o pseudo isotermo con un elevato coefficiente di scambio termico, a tutto vantaggio della resa di conversione e dei consumi energetici.

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Infatti, in accordo con la presente invenzione ogni singolo tubo per l'asportazione o l'alimentazione di calore si sviluppa lungo un piano sostanzialmente perpendicolare rispetto alle pareti laterali forate.

In questo modo, i tubi si trovano vantaggiosamente ad essere disposti in modo sostanzialmente parallelo rispetto al flusso comprendente reagenti e prodotti di reazione.

Questo significa che ogni singolo tubo è in contatto con una stessa porzione di reagenti e ne segue tutte le variazioni di calore, e quindi il profilo di temperatura di tale porzione di reagenti dall'ingresso all'uscita del letto catalitico. Di conseguenza, qualora all'interno del o dei letti catalitici siano disposti una pluralità di tubi secondo la presente invenzione, questi si troverebbero tutti a sopportare lo stesso carico termico asportando o alimentando la stessa quantità di calore a tutto vantaggio dell'efficienza di scambio termico del letto catalitico e della resa di conversione.

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Il reattore secondo l'invenzione permette di recuperare o alimentare calore a livello termico più elevato, con conseguente aumento dell'efficienza di scambio termico e della resa di conversione. Oppure a parità di resa di conversione rispetto all'arte nota, l'aumento dell'efficienza di scambio termico consente di diminuire il volume di catalizzatore richiesto con conseguenti risparmi in termini di spazio e di costi di investimento.

Un ulteriore vantaggio risultante dalla presente invenzione, è dato dal fatto che quando all'interno di un letto catalitico sono disposti una pluralità di tubi, questi possono venire alimentati tutti da una stessa fonte in quanto - essendo sottoposti allo stesso carico termico - non vi sono problemi di regolazione per l'alimentazione e l'asportazione del fluido di raffreddamento/riscaldamento.

Da notare infine come il reattore secondo la presente invenzione sia particolarmente semplice da realizzare e non richiede l'impiego di piastre tubiere, con conseguenti notevoli risparmi nei costi di investimento e manutenzione.

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Le caratteristiche ed i vantaggi del reattore secondo l'invenzione risulteranno inoltre dalla descrizione, fatta qui di seguito, di un esempio di realizzazione dato a titolo indicativo e non limitativo con riferimento ai disegni allegati.

5 In tali disegni:

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Breve descrizione dei disegni

- la figura 1 mostra una vista schematica prospettica e in esploso di un reattore isotermo per l'effettuazione di reazioni eterogenee esotermiche o endotermiche secondo una forma di realizzazione della presente invenzione;
- la figura 2 mostra una vista prospettica e schematica di un componente del reattore di figura 1;
- le figure 3 e 4 mostrano rispettive viste schematiche in scala ingrandita di dettagli costruttivi del componente di figura 2;
- la figura 5 mostra una vista schematica in sezione longitudinale del reattore isotermo di figura 1;
 - la figura 6 mostra una vista schematica, in sezione longitudinale e in scala ingrandita, di un particolare della sommità del reattore secondo l'invenzione;
- la figura 7 mostra una vista dall'alto di uno scambiatore di calore incorporato nel reattore di figura 1;
 - la figura 8 mostra una sezione schematica e longitudinale di un particolare dello scambiatore di calore di figura 7;
- la figura 9 mostra una sezione di un particolare costruttivo dello scambiatore di figura 7.

Descrizione dettagliata

Con riferimento a tali figure, con 1 è globalmente e schematicamente indicato un reattore isotermo o pseudo isotermo realizzato in accordo con la presente invenzione per l'effettuazione di reazioni eterogenee esotermiche o endotermiche.

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Il reattore 1 comprende un mantello 2 esterno di forma sostanzialmente cilindrica estesa verticalmente, chiusa inferiormente ma superiormente aperta. All'interno del mantello 2 è alloggiato un letto o cesto catalitico, generalmente indicato con 3.

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5 Un coperchio 36 di chiusura (figura 5) è previsto per chiudere l'imboccatura del mantello 2 alla fine della fase costruttiva in cantiere che prevede l'assiemaggio e/o il caricamento del catalizzatore.

Il letto 3 catalitico è delimitato lateralmente da contrapposte pareti 4 e 5 forate, rispettivamente esterna ed interna e di forma cilindrica, che consentono l'ingresso di un flusso comprendente reagenti e l'uscita di un flusso comprendente prodotti di reazione, come mostrato schematicamente in figura 5.

Le pareti cilindriche di contenimento del catalizzatore possono essere realizzate con varie soluzioni costruttive note quali pareti punzonate, perforate, ricoperte di rete metallica o da semplici lamiere forate.

Generalmente, le sostanze che vengono alimentate al reattore 1 sono in fase gassosa. Di conseguenza, nel seguito della descrizione, per flusso comprendente reagenti e flusso comprendente prodotti di reazione è da intendere un flusso di reagenti gassosi e di prodotti di reazione gassosi.

E' comunque evidente che il reattore secondo la presente invenzione può venire impiegato anche per reazioni in fase liquida o liquida/gassosa.

Nell'esempio qui descritto a puro titolo indicativo, le pareti forate 4 e 5 sono permeabili ai gas per l'ingresso nel letto catalitico 3 del flusso di reagenti gassosi e l'uscita del flusso di prodotti di reazione gassosi.

Il letto 3 catalitico è inoltre delimitato inferiormente da un fondo 6 non permeabile ai gas, che è supportato in corrispondenza del fondo del reattore 1, anche se non corrisponde con esso. Il letto catalitico potrebbe anche essere appeso al mantello, ma ciò non modificherebbe le peculiarità dell'invenzione.

Vantaggiosamente, nel mantello 2 è previsto almeno un bocchello 9 laterale di ingresso gas di reazione situato al di sopra del letto 3 catalitico in prossimità dell'imboccatura del mantello 2. A seconda delle esigenze

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possono essere previsti ulteriori bocchelli di adduzione. L'assenza di bocchelli sul coperchio 36 del mantello 2 ad alta pressione è resa possibile dalle particolarità strutturali del reattore secondo l'invenzione che appariranno nel seguito della descrizione.

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Almeno una coppia di fori 11, situati in posizione diametralmente opposta, pone in comunicazione il fondo 6 del letto 3 catalitico con rispettivi condotti 26 di scarico del letto 3 stesso. Tali condotti 26 sfociano in corrispondenti bocchelli 30.

I fori 11 possono anche essere più numerosi a seconda delle esigenze di scarico o della conformazione del fondo del mantello.

Per permettere un corretto attraversamento assiale-radiale del letto 3 catalitico, con la parte radiale preponderante rispetto alla parte assiale, la parete laterale 5 interna può presentare una breve porzione non forata e non permeabile ai gas che si estende da una estremità superiore della stessa. Com'è noto, un letto catalitico di tipo radiale e, in maniera ancora più marcata, un letto catalitico di tipo assiale-radiale sono particolarmente vantaggiosi in quanto consentono di ottenere alte rese di conversione ed allo stesso tempo basse perdite di carico dei reagenti gassosi, potendo utilizzare catalizzatori più attivi e di piccola granulometria.

Tra il mantello 2 e la parete laterale 4 esterna del letto catalitico è prevista una intercapedine 8 anulare per consentire una ottimale distribuzione ed alimentazione dei reagenti gassosi nel letto 3 catalitico e definisce una sorta di collettore esterno di adduzione dei gas. Per questo scopo, l'intercapedine 8 è in comunicazione di fluido con il bocchello 9 di ingresso gas alla sommità laterale del reattore 1.

A sua volta, la parete laterale 5 definisce un condotto 10 interno, sostanzialmente coassiale all'asse del reattore, per la raccolta e l'espulsione dal reattore 1 del flusso di gas reagiti che rappresenta un collettore interno di scarico dei gas. Per questo scopo, il condotto 10 è inferiormente rastremato e in comunicazione di fluido con un bocchello 17 di uscita gas. Il condotto 10 è chiuso superiormente da un setto 12.

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Per consentire l'asportazione o l'alimentazione di calore ai gas fluenti all'interno del letto 3 catalitico, così da mantenere il reattore 1 pseudo isotermo, o con predeterminato profilo termico, uno scambiatore 13 di calore è alloggiato nel letto 3 catalitico per il passaggio di un fluido di raffreddamento/riscaldamento. Tale scambiatore 13 è formato da una pluralità di tubi 15 a spirale, serpentina o simili disposti trasversalmente all'asse del mantello; questi tubi 15 sono in comunicazione di fluido con adduzione 14 е di scarico 16 collettori di raffreddamento/riscaldamento. In una forma preferita di realizzazione i tubi 15 sono a spirale piana.

La conformazione a spirale dei tubi 15 è particolarmente vantaggiosa sia in termini di efficienza di scambio termico, sia per quanto riguarda la semplicità e la flessibilità costruttiva. Infatti, un tubo conformato a spirale può adattarsi alle dimensioni più svariate del letto 3 catalitico ed in particolare riesce a coprire tutte le zone dello stesso permettendo in questo modo un efficace scambio termico in qualsiasi parte del letto.

Inoltre, a secondo della quantità di calore da asportare o da alimentare il tubo 15 a spirale può venire realizzato con spire più o meno ravvicinate, vale a dire con spirali a più principi.

Ad esempio, un tubo a spirale può essere realizzato con un passo di avvolgimento costante, e cioè con una distanza tra le varie spire uguale lungo tutta la spirale. Risultati particolarmente vantaggiosi sono però stati ottenuti variando il passo di avvolgimento col variare del raggio della spirale, in modo da adattarsi al profilo di temperatura dei reagenti gassosi all'interno del letto 3 catalitico, seguendone tutte le variazioni termiche.

In alternativa, si può ipotizzare l'impiego di tubi a serpentina intendendo con questo termine tubi sostanzialmente curviformi oppure con dei tratti curviformi alternati a dei tratti rettilinei.

In questo caso, la distanza tra le varie spire varia con il variare del raggio della spirale e, preferibilmente, il passo di avvolgimento viene fatto diminuire con l'aumentare del raggio della spirale. Al fine di tenere conto in modo ottimale della diversa distribuzione del flusso di reagenti gassosi nel letto 3 catalitico, in particolare nel caso di un letto assiale-radiale, i

tubi 15 possono anche venire disposti ad una distanza variabile tra i piani di due tubi adiacenti.

Cosi facendo, è possibile adattare la distanza dei tubi 15 a seconda della quantità di calore da asportare o da alimentare, in altre parole seguendo il profilo di temperatura nel letto 3 catalitico, a tutto vantaggio del grado di efficienza di scambio termico il quale si ripercuote favorevolmente sulla resa di conversione e sui consumi energetici.

In questo modo si è in grado di ottenere una concentrazione di tubi 15 maggiore, con una distanza tra i piani di due tubi adiacenti più ravvicinata, dove vi è una portata del flusso di reagenti gassosi maggiore e quindi carichi termici più elevati, ed una concentrazione di tubi 15 minore, con una maggiore distanza tra i piani di due tubi adiacenti, dove la portata è più bassa.

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Il fluido di raffreddamento o riscaldamento viene alimentato ai tubi 15 attraverso il collettore 14 di adduzione che è in comunicazione di fluido con uno o più bocchelli di ingresso 18. Lo stesso fluido viene estratto dai tubi 15 tramite il collettore 16 di scarico che è in comunicazione di fluido con uno o più bocchelli di uscita 19.

Vantaggiosamente, in accordo con l'invenzione, i collettori 14 e 16 sono estesi parallelamente ed alloggiati all'interno del condotto 10 delimitato dalla parete laterale 5 interna del letto 3 catalitico. Inferiormente, il collettore 14 fa capo al bocchello, 18 mentre il collettore 16 fa capo al bocchello 19.

Secondo un aspetto particolarmente vantaggioso della presente invenzione, i tubi 15 per l'asportazione o l'alimentazione di calore si sviluppano a spirale, serpentina o simili, preferibilmente a spirale piana, all'interno del letto 3 catalitico lungo un piano sostanzialmente trasversale all'asse del reattore 1 ed alla sue pareti laterali 4 e 5.

Nel seguito della descrizione e nelle successive rivendicazioni, con il termine di: 'tubo a spirale piana", si intende indicare un tubo sostanzialmente avvolto a spirale lungo un piano con passo costante o

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secondo una qualsivoglia progressione geometrica. Le spirali possono essere approssimate da un qualsivoglia numero di archi di cerchio.

In questo modo, ogni tubo 15 viene investito per tutta la sua lunghezza da una stessa porzione di gas reagenti, potendone così seguire tutte le variazioni termiche, e quindi il profilo di temperatura, di tale porzione di gas dall'ingresso all'uscita del letto 3 catalitico.

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Inoltre, tubi 15 disposti a spirale su rispettivi piani tra loro sostanzialmente paralleli, subiscono tutti lo stesso carico termico e quindi operano tutti allo stesso modo. Questo comporta una distribuzione ottimale delle temperature all'interno del letto 3, senza il rischio di fughe di temperatura, ed uno scambio termico efficiente tra i reagenti gassosi ed il fluido di raffreddamento o riscaldamento a tutto vantaggio della resa di conversione e dei consumi energetici.

E' anche importante notare come i tubi 15 si sviluppano all'interno del letto 3 catalitico lungo un piano sostanzialmente parallelo rispetto alla direzione di attraversamento del letto catalitico da parte del flusso di reagenti gassosi.

Nell'esempio di figura 1, il mantello 2 è disposto verticalmente e i tubi 15 si sviluppano a spirale nel letto 3 catalitico lungo piani sostanzialmente trasversali all'asse del mantello.

Ancor più vantaggiosamente, lo scambiatore 13 comprende una pluralità di unità modulari 20 sovrapposte una sull'altra e strutturalmente indipendenti; ciascuna unità 20 include almeno due tubi 15 a spirale piana avvolgenti un corrispondente tratto 25 della parete laterale 5 interna del letto 3 catalitico.

Nell'esempio di figura 1 è rappresentata solo la prima unità modulare 20 che viene alloggiata sul fondo 6 del letto 3 catalitico.

I piani delle spirali trasversali all'asse del reattore possono essere equidistanti o posti a distanza variabile.

I tubi a spirale piana, serpentina o simili sono alloggiati in una struttura a gabbia di forma essenzialmente a cestello, come mostrato nella figura 2 dalla quale si può apprezzare come ciascuna unità modulare 20

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comprenda inoltre una porzione 25 interna di parete cilindrica traforata che costituisce uno spezzone o tratto di detta parete laterale 5 interna di detto letto 3 catalitico.

In una possibile forma di realizzazione, ciascuna unità modulare potrebbe comprendere anche una porzione esterna di parete cilindrica traforata che costituisce uno spezzone o tratto di detta parete laterale esterna 4 di detto letto catalitico. In questo modo, non solo la parete laterale interna 5, ma anche la parete laterale esterna 4 del letto 3 catalitico verrebbe costruita dalla sovrapposizione delle unità modulari 20.

Ogni singola spirale di un'unità modulare 20 appoggia su un predeterminato numero di supporti estesi radialmente. Tali supporti possono fare parte di una struttura metallica a raggiera di tipo autoportante oppure essere semplicemente appoggiati sulla spirale sottostante.

Vantaggiosamente, come mostrato schematicamente in figura 7, la suddetta struttura metallica a raggiera di supporto delle spirali è formata da raggi 29 incernierati alle contrapposte estremità a montanti astiformi 28 che consentono una variazione della giacitura delle spirali da piana a conica in seguito alla differenza di temperatura che si genera durante il funzionamento del reattore tra il collettore esterno ed interno.

Le unità modulari 20 vengono impilate l'una sull'altra in fase di assemblaggio in cantiere del reattore 1 in modo tale che i suddetti montanti astiformi 28 possano essere collegati tra loro ad innesto rapido tramite elementi di raccordo 32 mostrati nella figura 9.

Tutti gli elementi costituenti gli interni sono liberi di subire dilatazioni termiche differenziate rispetto agli elementi a questi collegati durante qualsiasi fase di funzionamento del reattore.

I tubi 15 potrebbero anche venire collegati ai bocchelli 18 e 19 singolarmente, e quindi con un rispettivo condotto di alimentazione e di estrazione del fluido di raffreddamento/riscaldamento per ciascun tubo 15. Preferibilmente, però, ciascuna unità modulare 20 è dotata di rispettivi

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tratti 22, 23 di raccordo ai suddetti collettori 14, 16 di adduzione e di scarico del fluido di raffreddamento/riscaldamento.

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I tratti di raccordo 22 e 23 sono a loro volta collettori di distribuzione interposti tra una predeterminata pluralità di spirali ed i collettori 14, 16 che hanno rispettivamente la funzione di distribuire e di raccogliere il fluido in ingresso al reattore da tutte le spirali.

I collegamenti tra spirali e collettori sono realizzati attraverso tali tratti 22, 23 che si collegano ai collettori principali attraverso percorsi di fluido tali da garantire una flessibilità di collegamento ed evitare l'impiego di compensatori di dilatazione a tutto vantaggio dell'affidabilità.

I tubi 15 sono collegati ai tratti 22, 23 di raccordo tramite condotti intermedi 36 che, come illustrato nelle figure 2 e 3, attraversano ciascuna unità modulare 20 in direzione radiale tra piani attigui di spirali. Questi condotti intermedi 36 sfociano in tratti verticali 37 di ulteriore raccordo ai tratti 22, 23 e rendono possibile il collegamento di fluido tra ciascuno dei tubi 15 ai collettori principali d'ingresso e uscita.

In altre parole, ogni singola spirale è collegata alle sue contrapposte estremità da una parte ad un tratto di raccordo 22 che è in comunicazione di fluido con il collettore 14 di ingresso e, dall'altra parte, ad un tratto di raccordo 23 che è in comunicazione di fluido con il collettore 16 d'uscita.

In una forma preferita di realizzazione, ad esempio quando il reattore è di tipo gas/gas e con dimensioni piuttosto consistenti, ad ogni tratto di raccordo 22 o 23 fanno capo quattro spirali piane sovrapposte e ogni unità modulare 20 comprende tre pacchi di quattro spirali con i relativi tratti 22, 23 di collettore di raccordo.

Le unità modulari 20 vengono sovrapposte una sull'altra in cantiere durante il montaggio del reattore. Per calibrare e sovrapporre le unità modulari 20 in modo corretto sono previste nervature 27 di guida estese longitudinalmente in prefissata relazione distanziata lungo la superficie interna della parete laterale 4 esterna del letto 3 catalitico, come mostrato in figura 1.

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Guide 33 (contromezzi) sono previste esternamente su ciascuno dei montanti astiformi 28 per scorrere in ciascuna corrispondente nervature 27 e guidare in cantiere la sovrapposizione di ciascuna unità modulare 20 su una sottostante unità di medesima struttura.

Il punto di raccordo tra i tratti di collettore 22, 23 ed i collettori 14, 16 sono rappresentati da fori 34, 35 ricavati in allineamenti nei collettori 14, 16 in prefissata relazione distanziata in modo da risultare in corrispondenza della sommità delle varie unità modulari 20 durante la fase costruttiva in cui vengono impilate. In figura 1 è schematicamente illustrata questa particolarità costruttiva.

Il vantaggio di questa disposizione consiste nel fatto che i collegamenti da effettuare in cantiere mediante saldatura o flangiatura (come rappresentato nei disegni) risultano in numero limitato ed in posizione molto accessibile.

Da notare come la struttura che ne risulta è semplice da realizzare con conseguenti risparmi nei costi di investimento e manutenzione rispetto alle soluzioni della tecnica nota.

La forma di realizzazione rappresentata in figura 5 risulta essere particolarmente vantaggiosa in quanto con i tubi 15, tutti collegati tra loro, la struttura che ne risulta è particolarmente semplice da realizzare in quanto necessita solo un condotto 14 di alimentazione ed un condotto 16 di estrazione del fluido raffreddante o riscaldante.

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Il reattore secondo la presente invenzione può venire vantaggiosamente impiegato per l'effettuazione di sostanzialmente tutti i tipi di reazioni esotermiche o endotermiche. in particolare, esempi di reazioni esotermiche che bene si adattano ad essere effettuate con la presente invenzione possono essere metanolo, ammoniaca, formaldeide, ossidazioni organiche (ad esempio ossido di etilene); mentre esempio di reazioni endotermiche possono essere: stirene, e metilbenzene.

Quale fluido per l'asportazione di calore (nel caso di .reazioni esotermiche) viene preferibilmente impiegata acqua calda che si trasforma in vapore ad alto livello termico, oppure sali fusi e oli diatermici. Fluidi analoghi

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possono pure venire impiegati per l'alimentazione di calore nel caso di reazioni endotermiche.

Il funzionamento del reattore 1 per l'effettuazione di reazioni esotermiche o endotermiche secondo l'invenzione è qui di seguito brevemente descritto.

Da notare come le condizioni operative di pressioni e temperatura dei reagenti gassosi alimentati al letto 3 catalitico cosi come del fluido di raffreddamento o riscaldamento passante attraverso i tubi 15 sono quelle convenzionali per il tipo specifico di reazione che si intende effettuare, e pertanto non verranno descritte con particolare dettaglio nel seguito della descrizione.

A titolo di esempio vengono date unicamente le condizioni operative per la sintesi del metanolo, e cioè: pressione di sintesi 50-100 bar, temperatura di sintesi 200-300 °C, pressione del vapore generato 10-40 bar.

Con riferimento alla figura 5, un flusso di reagenti gassosi viene alimentato al letto 3 catalitico attraverso il bocchello 9 e l'intercapedine 8 di ingresso gas dalla sommità del reattore e fluisce al suo interno attraverso le pareti forate 4 e 5. Il letto 3 catalitico viene quindi attraversato con moto prevalentemente radiale (assiale-radiale) dai reagenti gassosi che a contatto con il catalizzatore reagiscono. Il calore sviluppato durante la reazione di sintesi oppure richiesto per l'effettuazione di tale reazione viene asportato dal o fornito al fluido passante attraverso i tubi 15.

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Tale fluido viene introdotto nel reattore 1 attraverso il collettore 14 associato al bocchello 18 ed alimentato ai tubi 15 delle spirali piane tramite ciascun raccordo 22 di ogni unità modulare 20. Da qui attraversa i tubi 15 del rispettivo gruppo che sono collegati in corrispondenza delle loro estremità libere ai tratti 23 di raccordo al collettore 16 ed evacuato dal reattore 1 tramite il bocchello 19.

Infine, il flusso di gas reagiti, ottenuto nel letto 3 catalitico, fuoriesce da quest'ultimo attraverso la parete interna 5 forata e viene raccolto nel condotto 10 centrale ed espulso dal reattore 1 tramite il bocchello 17.

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Da quanto più sopra esposto emergono con chiarezza i numerosi vantaggi raggiunti dalla presente invenzione, in particolare l'ottenimento di un reattore per l'effettuazione di reazioni esotermiche o endotermiche di semplice attuazione, affidabile e a bassi costi di investimento e manutenzione, che allo stesso tempo permette di operare ad alta resa di conversione, basse perdite di carico, bassi consumi energetici e con una elevata efficienza di scambio termico tra i reagenti gassosi ed il fluido di raffreddamento o riscaldamento.

La disposizione sopra descritta risulta inoltre vantaggiosa sotto diversi 10 aspetti tra cui evidenziamo:

- Minore carico meccanico sul catalizzatore che si trova alla base del letto e quindi maggiore durata della carica;
- Minori carichi meccanici sugli interni;
- Maggiore flessibilità nelle operazioni di carico / scarico del catalizzatore
- Facilità di ispezione degli interni;
 - Grazie alla modularità degli interni, è possibile tenere a magazzino uno o più elementi completi come parti di ricambio riducendo così al minimo i tempi di fermo impianto anche nel caso di eventuali danni agli interni.

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RIVENDICAZIONI

- 1. Reattore, in particolare per reazioni esotermiche, del tipo comprendente:
- un mantello (2) di forma sostanzialmente cilindrica;
- almeno un letto (3) catalitico nel mantello, comprendente una parete laterale esterna (4) cilindrica traforata, formante intercapedine (8) con detto mantello, ed una parete laterale interna (5) coassiale alla precedente;
- uno scambiatore di calore (13) in detto letto (3), lo scambiatore essendo formato da una pluralità di tubi (15) a spirale, serpentina o simili in comunicazione di fluido con collettori (14, 16) di adduzione e di scarico di un fluido di raffreddamento,
 - caratterizzato dal fatto:
- che detto scambiatore (13) comprende una pluralità di unità modulari
 (20) sovrapposte, strutturalmente indipendenti, ciascuna delle quali include almeno due tubi (15) a spirale, serpentina o simili disposti trasversalmente all'asse del mantello (2) e avvolgenti un corrispondente tratto (25) di detta parete laterale interna (5) di detto letto catalitico, e dotate di rispettivi tratti (22, 23) di raccordo a detti collettori (14, 16) di adduzione e di scarico.
 - 2. Reattore secondo la rivendicazione 1, caratterizzato dal fatto che ciascuna unità modulare (20) comprende anche una porzione interna (25) di parete cilindrica traforata che costituisce uno spezzone o tratto di detta parete laterale interna (5) di detto letto catalitico.
- 25 3. Reattore secondo la rivendicazione 1, caratterizzato dal fatto che i collettori (14, 16) di adduzione e di scarico sono estesi parallelamente ed alloggiati all'interno di un condotto (10) centrale delimitato dalla parete laterale interna (5) del letto (3) catalitico.
- 4. Reattore secondo la rivendicazione 1, caratterizzato dal fatto che dette unità modulari (20) comprendono ulteriori collettori (22, 23) di raccordo in comunicazione di fluido da una parte con ciascuna delle

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spirali dei tubi (15) a spirale, serpentina o simili di detto scambiatore (13) e, dall'altra parte, con detti collettori (14, 16) di adduzione e scarico.

5. Reattore secondo la rivendicazione 1, caratterizzato dal fatto che detta parete laterale esterna (4) è dotata verso l'interno di mezzi (27) di guida impegnabili in contromezzi (33) di guida previsti esternamente a ciascuna unità modulare (20).

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- 6. Reattore secondo la rivendicazione 1, caratterizzato dal fatto che i tubi (15) a spirale, serpentina o simili di ciascuna unità modulare (20) sono alloggiati in una struttura essenzialmente a cestello dotata di un predeterminato numero di supporti (29) estesi radialmente.
- 7. Reattore secondo la rivendicazione 6, caratterizzato dal fatto che detta struttura a cestello comprende raggi (29) di supporto delle spirali aventi contrapposte estremità incernierate a montanti astiformi (28) per consente una variazione della giacitura da piana a conica delle spirali in seguito alla differenza di temperatura che si genera nel reattore durante il funzionamento.
- 8. Reattore secondo la rivendicazione 7, caratterizzato dal fatto che detti montanti astiformi (28) sono collegabili tra loro ad innesto rapido durante la sovrapposizione di dette unità modulari (20).
- 9. Reattore secondo la rivendicazione 1, caratterizzato dal fatto che ciascuna unità modulare (20) comprende ulteriormente una porzione esterna di parete cilindrica traforata che costituisce uno spezzone o tratto di detta parete laterale esterna (4) di detto letto (3) catalitico.
- 25 10. Unità modulare per scambiatori di calore (13) da alloggiare in letti (3) catalitici di reattori in particolare per reazioni esotermiche, caratterizzata dal fatto di comprendere almeno due tubi (15) a spirale, serpentina o simili, avvolgenti una parete laterale interna (5) cilindrica del letto (3) catalitico, e rispettivi collettori (22, 23) di adduzione e di scarico collegati a detti tubi (15).

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RIASSUNTO

La presente invenzione fa riferimento ad un reattore, in particolare per reazioni esotermiche, del tipo comprendente: un mantello (2) di forma sostanzialmente cilindrica; almeno un letto (3) catalitico nel mantello, comprendente una parete laterale (4) esterna cilindrica traforata, formante intercapedine (8) con detto mantello (2), ed una parete laterale (5) interna coassiale alla precedente; uno scambiatore di calore (13) nel letto (3) catalitico, lo scambiatore (13) essendo formato da una pluralità di tubi (15) a spirale, serpentina o simili in comunicazione di fluido con collettori (14, 16) di adduzione e di scarico di un fluido di raffreddamento. Più in particolare, lo scambiatore (13) comprende una pluralità di unità modulari (20) sovrapposte, strutturalmente indipendenti, ciascuna delle quali include almeno due tubi (15) a spirale, serpentina o simili disposti trasversalmente all'asse del mantello e avvolgenti un corrispondente tratto (25) di detta parete laterale (5) interna del letto (3) catalitico, e dotate di rispettivi tratti (22, 23) di raccordo ai collettori (14, 16) di adduzione e di scarico.

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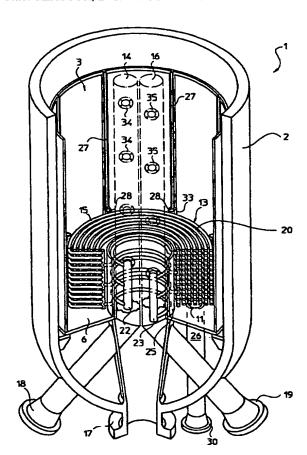
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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: REACTOR, IN PARTICULAR FOR EXOTHERMIC REACTIONS



(57) Abstract: The present invention relates to a reactor, in particular for exothermic reactions, of the type comprising: a shell (2) of substantially cylindrical shape, at least one catalytic bed (3) in the shell, comprising a perforated cylindrical outer side wall (4), which forms a free space (8) with said shell, and an inner side wall (5) coaxial to the previous one, a heat exchanger (13) in said bed (3), the heat exchanger (13) being formed by a plurality of tubes (15) in the form of a spiral, a coil or alike in fluid communication with feed and discharge collectors (14, 16) for a cooling fluid. More in particular, said heat exchanger (13) comprises a plurality of superimposed and structurally independent modular units (20), each of which includes at least two tubes (15) in the form of a spiral, a coil or alike arranged transversally to the shell axis and wrapping around a corresponding portion (25) of said inner side wall (5) of said catalytic bed (3), and provided with respective connecting portions (22, 23) to said feed and discharge collectors (14, 16).



WO 00/76653 A



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Title: "Reactor, in particular for exothermic reactions"

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DESCRIPTION

Field of application

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- The present invention relates to a reactor, in particular 5 for exothermic reactions, of the type comprising:
 - a shell of substantially cylindrical shape;
- at least one catalytic bed in the shell, comprising a perforated cylindrical outer side wall, which forms a free space with said shell, and an inner side wall coaxial to 10 the previous one;
 - as well as a heat exchanger in said bed, said heat exchanger being formed by a plurality of tubes shaped as spiral, coil or alike in fluid communication with feed and discharge collectors for a coolant fluid.

In this specific technical field, this kind of reactors is generally referred to with the term "isothermal reactors" "pseudo isothermal reactors", thus meaning reactors temperature of the inside which the catalytic bed(s) wherein the reaction takes place remains substantially constant or controlled according to a predetermined profile during both the exothermic and endothermic process steps.

Reactors of this type are for example used for the synthesis by means of exothermic reactions of chemical substances, such as for example methanol or formaldehyde. Such reactors may be also used for the synthesis of chemical substances obtained through endothermic reactions, such as for example styrene.

For this field of application, the need is more and more felt of realising isothermal reactors with a good yield and 30 reliability, which are also of simple construction with low

investment and maintenance costs. These features must, however, be compatible with a capability of operating with low pressure drops, low energy consumption and high heat exchange efficiency between the reactants and the cooling or heating fluid.

PCT/IB00/00636

Prior art

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The state of the art already proposes a number of solutions in order to try to fulfil the above mentioned requirements. For example, various types of isothermal reactors have been proposed with catalytic beds of radial type including a plurality of tubes for heat exchange provided vertically and arranged in a dense pattern.

An example of such reactors is described in the German Patent Application DE-A-3 318 098 in which a reactor comprising a bundle of tubes for heat exchange is foreseen, which are arranged according to a helicoidal form which extends vertically around an axial collector. It shall be noted that helicoidal arrangements for tubes for heat exchange are also known in isothermal reactors with axial catalytic bed, as described, for example, in the patents US-A-4 339 413 and US-A-4 636 365.

Although advantageous as far as some aspects are concerned, in that the radial configuration of the catalytic bed allows obtaining in an easy and economical way high production capacities with low pressure drops and low energy consumption, with respect to a bed of axial type, the isothermal reactor in the above mentioned German application has a number of drawbacks which are listed hereinbelow.

- 30 First of all the tube distribution, in the form of a helicoidal tube bundle does not allow adapting itself effectively to the mode of heat release or absorption from the flow of gaseous reactants which crosses the catalytic bed with radial motion. In fact the flow of gas that flows 35 perpendicularly with respect to the vertical arrangement of

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PCT/IB00/00636 3

the helicoidal tubes, comes into contact - when crossing the catalytic bed - with various tubes at different and this temperatures, causes a low heat exchange efficiency between the gaseous reactants and the heat exchange fluid.

In other words, in case of an exothermic reaction with the gaseous reactants flowing with a radial motion through the catalytic bed, the outer helicoidal tubes are impinged with a gas that has just started reacting, and hence releases a low amount of heat, whereas the inner helicoidal tubes are 10 impinged with a gas from which they receive an increasingly greater amount of heat up to a point where the heat released from the reaction gas is at a maximum. From that point on, the temperature decreases and hence the amount of 15 heat received by the helicoidal tubes arranged in proximity of the gas outlet wall of the catalytic bed decreases.

It results that each helicoidal tube receives a different amount of heat and hence has to withstand a different load. This causes a bad distribution of temperatures inside the catalytic bed thus decreasing the heat exchange efficiency.

For example, whenever hot water flows inside the tubes for removing the reaction heat, water that is transformed into steam, it is clear that with the helicoidal tube bundle arrangement each respective tube produces a different amount of steam. This implies relevant problems of control and of supply/withdrawal of cooling fluid in correspondence of the tube plates, as well as a bad distribution of water and steam inside such tubes.

30 To this respect, it is worth noting that all the tubes of the isothermal reactors described in DE-A-3 318 098 are parallel to each other. Therefore the available pressure drop for each helicoidal tube is the same.

In DE-A-3 318 098, the helicoidal tubes in contact with the 35 gaseous reactants at low temperature are subjected to a low

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thermal load, which implies a low degree of vaporisation for the water thus producing low water outflow speed and hence high flow rates, in terms of mass. On the contrary, the helicoidal tubes in contact with the high temperature gaseous reactants are subjected to a high thermal load, which implies a high degree of vaporisation for the water and ensuing high water outflow speed and hence low flow rates, in terms of mass.

Therefore, when the reactor is operating, a situation 10 occurs in which the helical tubes subjected to a high thermal load are those fed with less water and tend therefore to have an ever increasing degree of vaporisation and an ever decreasing capability of heat removal. This implies a far from optimum temperature distribution inside catalytic bed in case of moderately exothermic 15 the reactions as the methanol synthesis, whereas in case of exothermic strongly reactions such formaldehyde synthesis it may even bring to temperature overshoots.

20 Furthermore, the excessive vaporisation enhances the formation inside the tubes of deposits of residues present water, thus affecting their heat efficiency. All these disadvantages are independent from the fact that the tubes are arranged at a more or less each 25 distance between other according temperature profile of the gaseous reactants inside the catalytic bed.

A further disadvantage of the reactor according to the prior art is the relevant structural and manufacturing complexity resulting from the helicoidal design of the tube bundle that requires high investment and maintenance costs.

Just because of these disadvantages, the isothermal for carrying out exothermic or endothermic heterogeneous syntheses with a radial catalytic bed and a helicoidal or vertical tube bundle have found to date little practical application, notwithstanding the WO 00/76653 PCT/IB00/00636 5

increasingly felt need in the field of the high capacity reactors.

A further known technical solution is described in the German Patent Application DE-A-3 708 957 in which, in an embodiment thereof, reference is made to a isothermal reactor of the type comprising a shell of substantially cylindrical shape, at least a catalytic bed in the shell, comprising an outer cylindrical unperforated side wall and an inner side wall coaxial to the unperforated previous one a perforated annular bottom. Further on, exchanger is foreseen in the catalytic bed, which heat exchanger is formed by a plurality of tubes having the form of a spiral arranged transversally to the shell axis, said tubes being in fluid communication with feed and discharge collectors for a cooling fluid.

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As in the above known technical solution, this structure for a reactor is difficult to carry out with low investment costs. The complexity of the heat exchanger does not allow repairing possible damages, which should occur inside the reactor during its operation.

Further on, the gaseous reactants flow inside the bed in a transversal way with respect to the spiral-shaped tubes for the passage of the cooling fluid, and, therefore, the heat exchange between the fluids has the same above listed drawbacks.

The technical problem underlying the present invention is that of providing an isothermal orpseudo-isothermal reactor for carrying out exothermic orendothermic heterogeneous reactions, which has structural functional features such to allow a simple and reliable realisation, that requires low investment and maintenance costs and allows operating with low mechanical loads on the internals and with a high heat exchange efficiency between the reactants and the cooling or heating fluid.

Summary of the invention

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The resolutive idea at the basis of the present invention is that of foreseeing a plurality of modular units formed by groups of tubes wound as a spiral, a coil or alike and each forming a portion of heat exchanger, modular units which can be superimposed and stacked the one on the other on site and connected to feed and discharge collectors for the cooling/heating fluid.

On the basis of such resolutive idea, the technical problem is solved, according to the invention, by a reactor of the previously indicated type and characterised in that the heat exchanger comprises a plurality of superimposed and structurally independent modular units, each of them including at least two tubes formed as a spiral, a coil or alike provided transversally to the axis of the shell and wrapping around a corresponding portion of said inner side wall of said catalytic bed, and provided with respective connecting portions to said feed and discharge collectors.

Thanks to the present invention, it is possible to realise,
in a simple an effective way, an isothermal or pseudoisothermal reactor with a high heat exchange coefficient,
to all advantage of the conversion yield and of the energy
consumption.

In fact, according to the present invention, each single tube for removing or supplying heat extends along a plane substantially perpendicular with respect to the perforated side walls.

In this way, the tubes are advantageously arranged in a substantially parallel way with respect to the flow comprising reactants and reaction products.

This means that each single tube is in contact with a same portion of reactants and follows every heat variation thereof, and hence the temperature profile of said portion of reactants from the inlet to the outlet of the catalytic

WO 00/76653

bed. Accordingly, whenever a plurality of tubes according to the present invention is arranged inside the catalytic bed(s), each of them would have to withstand the same thermal load, removing or supplying the same amount of heat to all advantage of the heat exchange efficiency of the catalytic bed and of the conversion yield.

The reactor according to the invention allows recovering or supplying heat at a higher thermal level, thus resulting in an increase of heat exchange efficiency and of the conversion yield. Or, the conversion yield being the same, with respect to the prior art, the increase of the heat exchange efficiency allows decreasing the volume of catalyst required, with ensuing savings in terms of room and investment costs.

15 A further advantage of the present invention consists in that, when a plurality of tubes is arranged inside a catalytic bed, the tubes may be supplied all from a same source as - all being subjected to a same thermal load - there are no control problems for supplying and withdrawing the cooling/heating fluid.

Finally, it shall be noted that the reactor according to the present invention is particularly simple to realise and does not require using tube plates with ensuing relevant savings in terms of investment and maintenance costs.

The features and advantages of the reactor according to the invention will become clearer from the following description, of an indicative and not limiting example of an embodiment provided with reference to the attached drawings.

30 In such drawings:

Brief description of the drawings

- figure 1 shows a perspective exploded schematic view of an isothermal reactor for carrying out exothermic or endothermic heterogeneous reactions according to an embodiment of the present invention;

- figure 2 shows a perspective and schematic view of a component of the reactor in figure 1;
- figure 3 and 4 show schematic views in enlarged scale 5 of constructive details of the component of figure 2, respectively;
 - figure 5 shows a schematic view in longitudinal section of the isothermal reactor of figure 1;
- figure 6 shows a schematic view, in longitudinal
 section and enlarged scale, of a detail of the top of the reactor according to the invention;
 - figure 7 shows a top view of a heat exchanger included in the reactor of figure 1;
- figure 8 shows a schematic and longitudinal view of a detail of the heat exchanger of figure 7;
 - figure 9 shows a section of a constructive detail of the heat exchanger of figure 7.

Detailed description

- With reference to such figures, an isothermal or pseudoisothermal reactor realised according to the present invention for carrying out exothermic and endothermic heterogeneous reactions is referred to in its whole and schematically with numeral 1.
- Reactor 1 comprises an outer shell 2 of substantially cylindrical shape, which extends vertically and is closed at the bottom and open at the top. Inside shell 2 there is housed a catalytic bed or basket, generally indicated with 3.
- A closing cover 36 (figure 5) is foreseen for closing the 30 entrance of the shell 2 at the end of the construction phase at site that foresees the assembly and/or loading of

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the catalyst.

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The catalytic bed 3 is bounded sideways by opposed cylindrically shaped outer and inner perforated walls 4 and 5, respectively, which allow the inlet of a flow comprising reactants and the outlet of a flow comprising the reaction products, as schematically shown in figure 5.

The cylindrical walls for containing the catalyst may be with different known constructive consisting for example of walls, which are punched, perforated, covered with metallic mesh or of simply perforated sheets.

Generally, the substances, which are fed to the reactor 1, are in gaseous phase. Accordingly, in the following description, the expressions "flow comprising reactants" and "flow comprising reaction products" is meant to indicate a flow of gaseous reactants and a flow of gaseous reaction products, respectively.

However, it is clear that the reactor according to the present invention may be employed even for reactions in liquid or liquid/gas phase.

In the present example, as a matter of indication only, the perforated walls 4 and 5 are permeable to the gases so as to allow the inlet into the catalytic bed 3 of the flow of reactant gases and the outlet of the flow of gaseous reaction products, respectively.

The catalytic bed 3 is further bounded in its lower part by a bottom 6 not permeable to gases, which is supported in correspondence of the reactor bottom, even if it does not correspond with it. The catalytic bed might be even hanged to the shell, although this would not modify the features of the invention.

Advantageously, in the shell 2 a side nozzle 9 is provided for the inlet of the reaction gas, which is arranged above the catalytic bed 3 in proximity of the entrance of the

shell 2. According to the requirements, further feed nozzles might be provided. The absence of nozzles on the cover 36 of the high pressure shell 2 is made possible by the structural features of the reactor according to the invention that will be clear in the following description.

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At least a pair of holes 11, arranged in diametrically opposite position, puts in communication the bottom 6 of the catalytic bed 3 with respective discharge ducts 26 of the bed 3 itself. Such ducts 26 lead into respective nozzles 30.

The number of holes 11 may even be higher according to the discharge requirements or to the design of the shell bottom.

In order to allow a correct axial-radial crossing of the catalytic bed 3, with the radial portion being more relevant than the axial portion, the inner side wall 5 may have a short portion unperforated and impermeable to gases which extends from an upper end of the same. As known, a catalytic bed of the radial type, and even more remarkably, a catalytic bed of the axial-radial type are particularly advantageous in that they allow obtaining high conversion yields and at the same time low pressure drops of the gaseous reactants, rendering the use of more active and low particle size catalysts possible.

Between the shell 2 and the outer side wall 4 of the catalytic bed an annular free space 8 is provided for achieving an optimum distribution and feed of the gaseous reactants into the catalytic bed 3 and defines a kind of outer feed collector for the gases. To this end, the free space 8 is in fluid communication with the nozzle 9 for the gas inlet at the side top of the reactor 1.

In turn, the side wall 5 defines an inner duct 10, substantially coaxial to the reactor axis, for collecting and discharging from the reactor 1 the flow of reacted gases; such duct 10 is a discharge inner collector for the

WO 00/76653 PCT/IB00/00636

gases. To this end, the duct 10 is tapered in its lower part and in fluid communication with a nozzle 17 for the gas outlet. In its upper part, the duct 10 is closed by a baffle 12.

- To allow the removal or supply of heat to the gas flowing inside the catalytic bed 3, so to maintain the reactor 1 in a pseudo isothermal condition, or with a predetermined temperature profile, a heat exchanger 13 is housed in the catalytic bed 3 for the passage of a cooling/heating fluid.
- Such exchanger 13 is comprises a plurality of tubes 15 in the form of a spiral, a coil or alike arranged transversely with respect to the axis of the shell; these tubes 15 are in fluid communication with feed and discharge collectors 14 and 16, respectively, for the cooling/heating fluid. In
- 15 a preferred embodiment, the tubes 15 are in the form of a flat spiral.

spiral design of the tubes 15 is particularly advantageous both in terms of heat exchange efficiency, and in terms of constructive simplicity and flexibility. In fact, a tube shaped as a spiral may adapt itself to any of 20 the various sizes which a catalytic bed 3 may take on and in particular is capable of covering all areas of the bed itself, thus achieving an effective heat exchange in any portion of the bed.

25 Further on, according to the amount of heat to be removed or to be supplied, the spiral tube 15 may be designed with more or less close turns, i.e. with multi-principle spirals.

For example, a spiral tube may be realised with a constant winding pitch, that is to say an equal distance between the various turns along the complete spiral. Anyway, particularly advantageous results have been obtained by varying the winding pitch according to the variation of the radius of the spiral, so to adapt it to the temperature profile of the gaseous reactants inside the catalytic bed 3, following all its thermal variations.

As an alternative, the use of coil-shaped tubes may be taken into consideration; such expression is used to indicate substantially curvilinear tubes or tubes having an alternate pattern of curvilinear and rectilinear portions.

In this instance, the distance between the various turns varies according to the variation of the radius of the spiral, and, preferably, the winding pitch is made decrease as the radius of the spiral increases. In order to take into account in an optimal way the different distribution of the flow of gaseous reactants inside the catalytic bed 3, specifically in the case of an axial-radial bed, tubes 15 may even be arranged at a distance which varies from one plane of two adjacent tubes to the other.

In doing so, it is possible to adapt the distance of the tubes 15 according to the amount of heat to be removed or supplied; in other words following the temperature profile inside the catalytic bed 3, to all advantage of the degree of heat exchange efficiency, which favourably reflects on the conversion yield and energy consumption.

In this way it is possible to obtain a greater concentration of tubes 15, with a closer distance between the planes of two adjacent tubes, where a greater flow rate of gaseous reactants and hence greater thermal loads occur, and a lower concentration of tubes 15, with a greater distance between the planes of two adjacent tubes, where a lower flow rate exists.

The cooling or heating fluid is supplied to the tubes 15 through the feed collector 14 which is in fluid communication with one o more of the inlet nozzles 18. The same fluid is extracted from the tube 15 through the discharge collector 16 that is in fluid communication with one or more of the outlet nozzles 19.

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Advantageously, according to the invention, the collectors 14 and 16 extend parallel and housed inside the duct 10 35 bounded by the inner side wall 5 of the catalytic bed 3. In WO 00/76653 PCT/IB00/00636

its lower part, the collector 14 leads to the nozzle 18, whereas the collector 16 leads to the nozzle 19.

According to a particularly advantageous aspect of the present invention, the tubes 15 for removing or supplying heat extend in the form of a spiral, coil or alike, preferably in the form of a flat spiral, inside the catalytic bed 3 along a plane substantially transversal to the axis of the reactor 1 and to the side walls 4 and 5.

In the following description and attached claims, the term
"tube in the form of a flat spiral" is meant to indicate a
tube substantially wounded as a spiral along a plane with a
pitch which is constant or follows any possible geometrical
progression. The spirals may be approximated by any
possible number of arcs of circle.

In this way, each tube 15 is impinged for its entire length by a same portion of the reactant gases, thus following all their temperature variations, and hence their temperature profile, from inlet to outlet of the catalytic bed 3.

Further on, tubes 15 arranged in the form of a spiral on 20 respective planes substantially parallel to each other. all undergo the same thermal load and accordingly operate in same way. This implies an optimum temperature distribution inside the bed 3, without the risk temperature overshoots, and an effective heat exchange between the gaseous reactants and the cooling or heating 25 fluid to all advantage of the conversion yield and of the energy consumption.

It is also important to note that the tubes 15 extend inside the catalytic bed 3 along a plane substantially parallel with respect to the direction of crossing of the catalytic bed by the flow of gaseous reactants.

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In the example of figure 1, the shell 2 is arranged in vertical and the tubes 15 extend in the form of a spiral inside the catalytic bed along planes substantially

WO 00/76653 PC

transversal to the axis of the shell.

Still more advantageously, the heat exchanger 13 comprises a plurality of modular units 20 which are superimposed on one another and structurally independent; each unit 20 includes at least two tubes 15 in the form of a flat spiral which wrap around a respective portion 25 of the inner side wall 5 of the catalytic bed 3.

In the example of figure 1, only the first modular unit 20 is shown, that is housed on the bottom 6 of the catalytic 10 bed 3.

The planes of the spirals transversal to the axis of the reactor may be arranged at the same distance or at varying distance.

The tubes in the form of a flat spiral, coil or alike are housed in a cage structure having substantially the form of a basket, as shown in figure 2, where it can be appreciated that each modular unit 20 further comprises an inner portion 25 of perforated cylindrical wall that builds up a piece or portion of said inner side wall 5 of said catalytic bed 3.

According to a potential embodiment, each modular unit portion comprise also an outer of perforated cylindrical wall building up a piece or portion of said outer side wall 4 of said catalytic bed. In this way, not only the inner side wall 5 but also the outer side wall 4 3 the catalytic bed would be formed superimposition of the modular units 20.

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Each single turn of a modular unit 20 lays on a predetermined number of radially extending supports. Such supports may form part of a star-shaped metal structure of the self-supporting type or may be simply laying on the spiral underneath.

Advantageously, as schematically shown in figure 7, the aforesaid support star-shaped metal structure for the

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spirals is formed by rays 29 hinged at their opposed ends to uprights 28 in the form of rods which allow a variation of the position of the spirals from flat to conical as a result of the temperature difference which develops during the operation of the reactor between outer and inner collector.

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The modular units 20 are stacked the one on the other on site during the assembly step of the reactor 1 so that the aforesaid rod-shaped uprights 28 may be connected between each other through quick clutching by means of connecting elements 32 shown in figure 9.

All the elements placed inside the device are free to undergo differentiated thermal expansions with respect to the elements thereto connected during any operation of the reactor.

The tubes 15 could even be singularly connected to the nozzles 18 and 19, and hence with a respective feed and withdrawal duct for the cooling/heating fluid for each tube 15. Preferably, however, each modular unit 20 is provided with respective connecting portions 22, 23 to said feed and discharge collectors 14, 16 for the cooling/heating fluid.

The connecting portions 22 and 23 are in turn distribution collectors interposed between a predetermined plurality of spirals and the collectors 14, 16, whereby such collectors respectively have the task of distributing and collecting the fluid entering the reactor from all the spirals.

The connections between spirals and collectors are formed by said portions 22, 23 that are connected to the main collectors through fluid paths which guarantee a flexibility of connection and avoid the use of expansion compensators to all advantage of the reliability.

The tubes 15 are connected to the connecting portions 22, 23 through intermediate ducts 36 which, as shown in figures 2 and 3, cross each modular unit 20 in radial direction

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between adjacent planes of spirals. Each intermediate duct 36 lead to further vertical connecting portions 37 to the ducts 22, 23 and make the fluid communication between each of the tubes 15 to the main inlet and outlet collectors possible.

In other words, each single spiral is connected at opposed ends thereof, on one end, to a connecting portion 22 that is in fluid communication with the inlet collector 14 and, on the other end, to a connecting portion 23 that is in fluid communication with the outlet collector 16.

In a preferred embodiment, such as when the reactor is of the gas/gas type, and has pretty relevant dimensions, four superimposed flat spirals lead to each connecting portion 22 or 23, respectively, and each modular unit 20 comprises three groups of four spirals with the respective portions 22, 23 of the connecting collector.

The modular units 20 are superimposed on one another on site during the assembly of the reactor. In order to adjust and superimpose correctly the modular units 20, guide ribs 27 are foreseen, extending longitudinally in a predetermined distanced relationship along an inner surface of the outer side wall 4 of the catalytic bed 3, as shown in figure 1.

Guides 33 (counter-means) are provided externally to each of the rod-like uprights 28 so to slide in each of the corresponding ribs 27 and guide on site the superimposition of each modular unit 20 on a underlying unit having the same structure.

The connection points between the portions of collector 22,
30 23 and the collectors 14, 16 are represented by holes 34,
35 formed in alignments in the collectors 14, 16 in
predetermined distanced relationship in such a way to end
up in correspondence of the top of the various modular
units 20 during the construction step when they are stacked
35 the one on the other. In figure 1 there is schematically

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WO 00/76653 PCT/IB00/00636

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illustrated this constructive feature.

The advantage of such arrangement consists in that the number of connections to be formed on site through welding or flanging (as shown in the drawings) is quite reduced, those connections being provided in very accessible locations.

It shall be noted that the resulting structure is very simple to realise with ensuing savings in terms of maintenance and investment costs with respect to the solutions of the prior art.

The embodiment shown in figure 5 is particularly advantageous in that having the tubes 15, all connected to each other, the resulting structure is particularly simple to be realised as it needs only one feed collector 14 and one withdrawal collector 16 for the cooling or heating fluid.

The reactor according to the present invention can be advantageously employed for carrying out substantially any kind of exothermic or endothermic reaction. Specifically, examples of exothermic reactions that may be well adapted to be carried out with the reactor of the present invention are methanol synthesis, ammonia synthesis, formaldehyde synthesis, organic oxidation (such as ethylene oxide); whereas examples of endothermic reactions may be: styrene and methylbenzene synthesis.

Hot water which transforms in steam at a high thermal level as well as fused salts and diathermic oils are preferably used as fluid for heat removal (in case of exothermic reactions). Analogous fluids may be also used for supplying heat in case of endothermic reactions.

The operation of the reactor 1 for carrying out exothermic or endothermic reactions according to the invention is briefly described hereinbelow.

It shall be noted that the pressure and temperature

operational conditions for the gaseous reactants fed to the catalytic bed 3 as well those of the cooling or heating fluid passing through the tubes 15 are conventional for the specific kind of reaction that is intended to be carried out, and therefore will not be described with specific detail in the following description.

As a matter of example only, the operational conditions for methanol synthesis are given, i.e. synthesis pressure 50-100 bar, synthesis temperature 200-300 °C, pressure of the steam generated 10-40 bar.

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With reference to figure 5, a flow of gaseous reactants is fed to the catalytic bed 3 through the nozzle 9 and the gas inlet free space 8 from the top of the reactors and flows inside it through the perforated walls 4 and 5. The catalytic bed 3 is hence crossed with mainly radial (axial-radial) motion by the gaseous reactants that in contact with the catalyst react. The heat developed during the synthesis reaction or required for carrying out such reaction is removed by or supplied to the fluid passing through the tubes 15.

Such fluid is introduced in the reactor 1 through the collector 14 associated to the nozzle 18 and fed to the tubes 15 of the flat spirals through each connection element 22 of each modular unit 20. Then, starting from here, it crosses the tubes 15 of the respective group which are connected in correspondence of their free ends to the portions 23 of connection to the collector 16 and is evacuated from the reactor 1 through the nozzle 19.

Finally, the flow of reacted gases obtained in the catalytic bed 3, comes out from the latter through the perforated inner wall 5 and is collected in the central duct 10 and expelled by the reactor 1 through the nozzle 17.

From the presentation above, the numerous advantages achieved by the present invention arise clearly, in

particular the provision of a reactor for carrying out exothermic or endothermic reactions of simple realisation, reliable and at low investment and maintenance costs, that at the same time allows operating with a high conversion yield, low pressure drops, low energy consumption and with a high heat exchange efficiency between the gaseous reactants and the cooling or heating fluid.

Further on, the above described arrangement is advantageous under various aspects, among which we can highlight:

- lower mechanical load onto the catalyst that lays at the bottom of the bed and hence longer duration of the charge;
 - lower mechanical loads on the internals;
 - greater flexibility in the catalyst load/unload operations;
- 15 easy inspection of the internals;

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- thanks to the modularity of the internals, it is possible to have in stock one or more complete elements as spare parts, thus reducing to the minimum the duration of the plant shutdown even in case of possible damages to the internals.

WO 00/76653 PC17

CLAIMS

- 1. Reactor, in particular for exothermic reactions, of the type comprising:
- a shell (2) of substantially cylindrical shape;
- 5 at least one catalytic bed (3) in the shell, comprising a perforated cylindrical outer side wall (4), which forms a free space (8) with said shell, and an inner side wall (5) coaxial to the previous one;
- a heat exchanger (13) in said bed (3), said heat exchanger being formed by a plurality of tubes (15) in the form of a spiral, a coil or alike in fluid communication with feed and discharge collectors (14, 16) for a cooling fluid,

characterised in that:

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- said heat exchanger (13) comprises a plurality of superimposed and structurally independent modular units (20), each of which includes at least two tubes (15) in the form of a spiral, a coil or alike arranged transversally to the shell axis (2) and wrapping around a corresponding portion (25) of said inner side wall (5) of said catalytic bed, and provided with respective connecting portions (22, 23) to said feed and discharge collectors (14, 16).
 - 2. Reactor according to claim 1, characterised in that each modular unit (20) comprises also an inner portion (25) of perforated cylindrical wall that builds up a piece or a portion of said inner side wall (5) of said catalytic bed.
 - 3. Reactor according to claim 1, characterised in that the feed and discharge collectors (14, 16) extend parallel and are housed inside a central duct (10) bounded by the inner side wall (5) of the catalytic bed (3).
 - 4. Reactor according to claim 1, characterised in that said modular units (20) further comprise connecting collectors

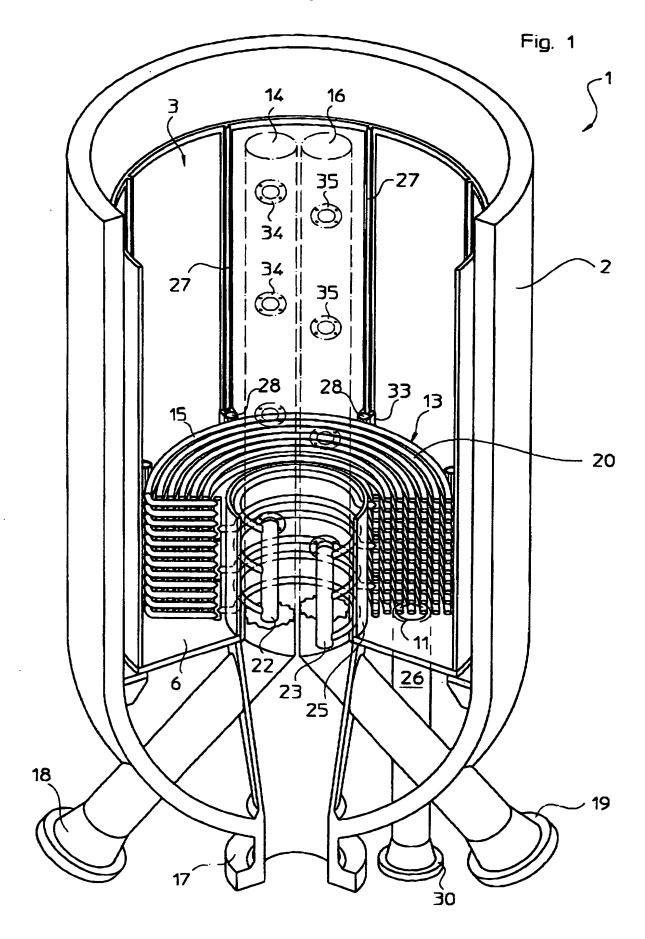
WO 00/76653 PCT/IB00/00636

- (22, 23) in fluid communication on one end with each spiral of the tubes (15) in the form of a spiral, a coil or alike of said heat exchanger (13) and, on the other end, with said feed and discharge collectors (14, 16).
- 5. Reactor according to claim 1, characterised in that said outer side wall (4) is provided towards its inner part with guide means (27) engageable in guide counter-means (33) provided externally of each modular unit (20).
- 6. Reactor according to claim 1, characterised in that the tubes (15) in the form of a spiral, a coil or alike of each modular unit (20) are housed in an essentially basketshaped structure provided with a predetermined number of supports (29) extending radially.
- 7. Reactor according to claim 6, characterised in that said basket-shaped structure comprises rays (29) for the support of the spirals having opposed ends hinged to rod-like uprights (28) to enable a variation of the position from flat to conical of the spirals as a result of the temperature difference that develops inside the reactor during its operation.
 - 8. Reactor according to claim 7, characterised in that said rod-like uprights (28) are connectable to each other through a quick clutching during the superimposition of said modular units (20).
- 9. Reactor according to claim 1, characterised in that each modular unit (20) further comprises an outer portion of perforated cylindrical wall that builds up a piece or a portion of said outer side wall (4) of said catalytic bed (3).
- 10. Modular unit for heat exchangers (13) to be housed in catalytic beds (3) of reactors, in particular for exothermic reactions, characterised in that it comprises at least two tubes (15) in the form of a spiral, a coil or alike, which wrap around an inner cylindrical side wall (5)

WO 00/76653 PCT/IB00/00636

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of the catalytic bed (3), and respective feed and discharge collectors (22, 23) connected to said tubes (15).



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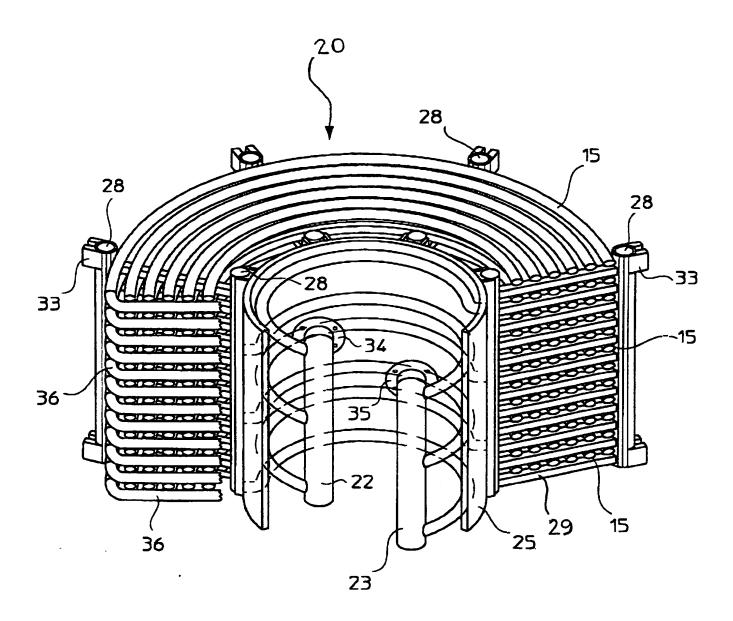


Fig. 2

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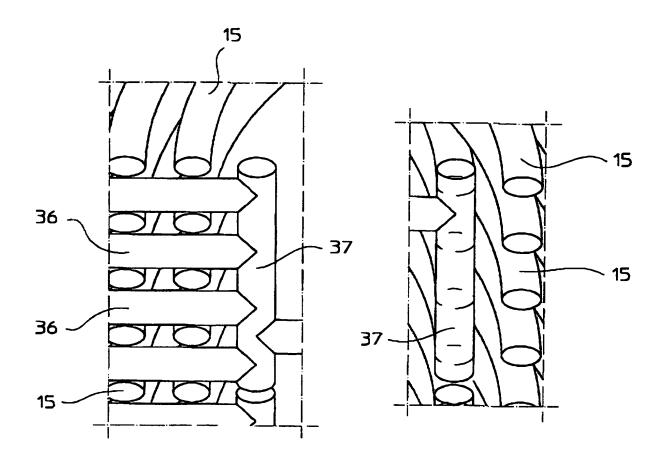


Fig. 3

Fig. 4

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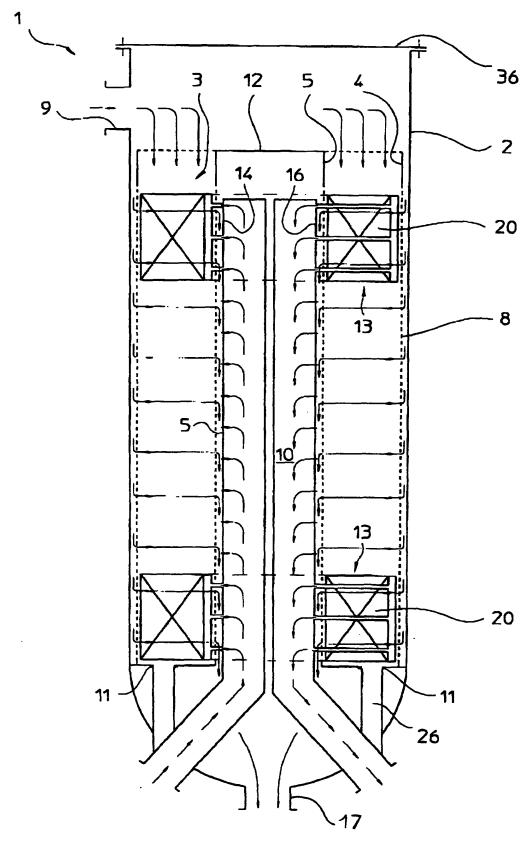


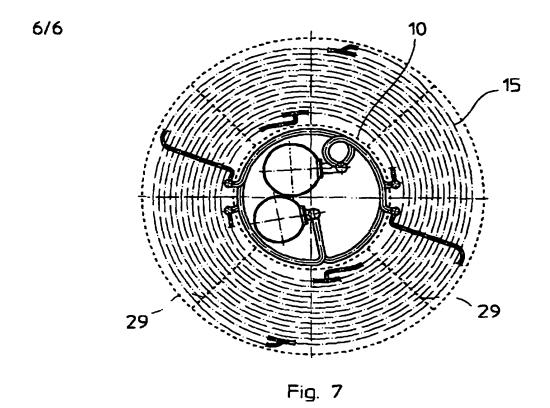
Fig. 5

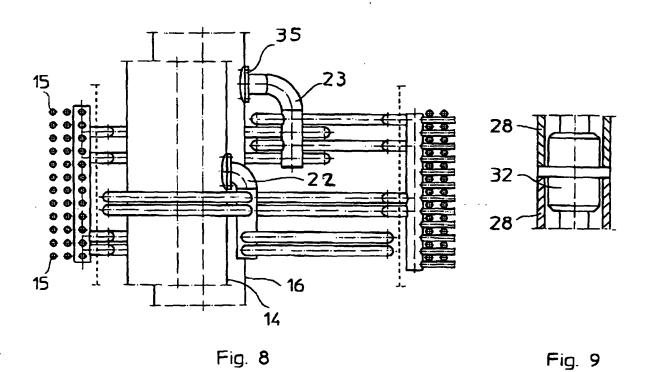
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Fig. 6

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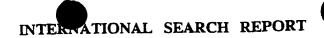




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